

# Researching Bird and Mammal Populations on the Liben Plain, Ethiopia

Final Report  
Project ID: 0139910  
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**Aim: Down listing the status of Liben Lark from the IUCN Category**

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**Project Location: Liben Plains, Guji Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia**  
**Dates in the field: August 17 – 31, 2010: November 5 – 17, 2010: March 1– 14, 2011:  
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Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) and the Oromia Forestry and Wildlife Enterprise (OFWE), the main office in Addis as well as the branch in the Guji and Borena Zone, are gratefully acknowledged for their efficient facilitation of the necessary permits for carrying out this project. Our gratitude goes to the Guji Zone and Liben District Administration for their help and involvement in some activities during the project. We thank the Ciminto and Meisa Peasant Association (PA) community for being very welcoming and for helping us a lot by providing useful information about the area. We are very grateful to the SOS Sahel and the Save the Children Offices in Negelle, Borana for sharing their experience and for providing advice on rangeland related issues.

We thank the Negelle High School and the Dibbe Adama Primary School administrators and students for their active participation in the project. We really appreciate their interest and dedication in making the education program possible. Our deepest gratitude goes to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) for providing us with second-hand binoculars and pins, which were very helpful for the education program. We thank Wildsounds for donating bird guidebooks for the project, which were handed out to the

schools. Our gratitude goes to Peter Damerell who gave us very good advice on how to improve and evaluate the education program. We thank Terence Vel and Barrie Cooper for providing us with materials to use for the education program. Our gratitude goes to EWNHS and Forum for Environment for supplying educational materials which were handed out to the schools. We are very grateful to David Lindo and Russell Spencer, who have helped us during one of the field trips by educating and inspiring the students as well as by documenting the activities.

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Our final gratitude goes to our friends and family who have contributed a lot to help us carry out this project.

## SECTION ONE

### Summary

The project was conducted in the Liben plain, which was a well known productive rangeland in Africa. It is also known to be the home of the critically endangered Liben Lark. The projects aim were to assess the bird and mammal species abundance and richness, raise awareness about the importance of the plain, to assist in future decision making and to build our skills. After our surveys, we found 86 species of birds while running our transects four times in the project year. And 25 species of mammals were said to be found in the area according to the 86 respondents interviewed. Educational programs were held in two schools by holding lectures, bird watching practical sessions and through taking the students to a field trip on the Liben plain. Brochures were produced and two billboards were put up to promote the biodiversity of the area. A workshop was also held in order to present our project findings and to bring together stakeholders to recommend solutions for the rehabilitation of the rangelands and for saving the Liben Lark from extinction.

### Introduction

The Liben plains are part of the Borana rangelands in the southern part of Ethiopia's Oromia region, stretching east and south of Negele, the capital of Guji Zone. Negele is over 310 Km southeast of Hawassa as shown in Figure 1. The altitude range of the area is between 1,000 m asl and 2,000 m asl. The annual rainfall of the area is around 700 mm and the annual mean temperature is 19.2°C. It is hottest before March while the short dry season is from June to September (EWNHS, 1996). The grass is typically less than 10 cm high and has a few scattered trees and thorny and herbaceous shrubs (Spottiswoode *et al*, 2009).

The Borana rangelands were once known to have the highest grazing potential in East Africa and to have the highly productive breed of Ethiopian Boran cattle, which has not been the case since the last 30 to 40 years (Sabine, 2004). The Liben Plain was known to harbor a variety of wild animals and birds. It is designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) and is part of the South Ethiopian Highlands Endemic Bird Area (EBA) and home

to several threatened species, including the Liben Lark (formerly known as Sidamo Lark) (EWNHS, 1996).

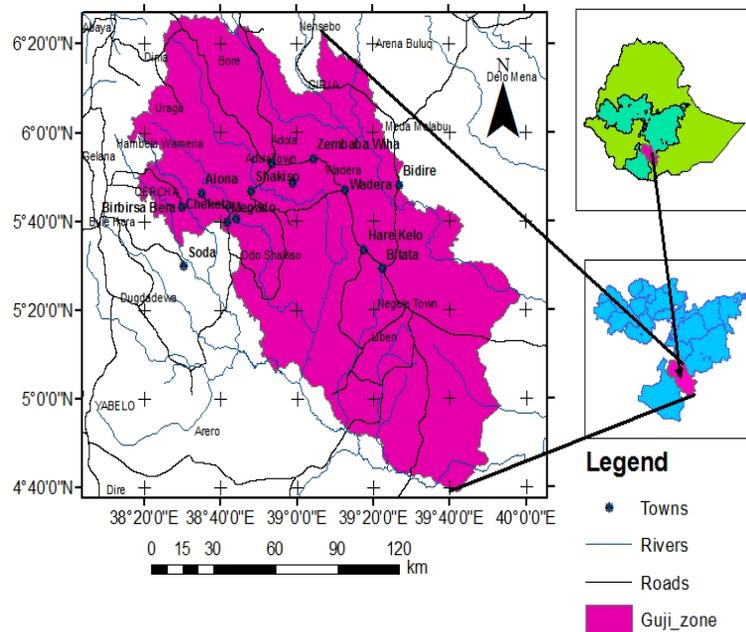


Figure 1. Map of the study area

The rangelands are now quite degraded due to the cumulative effect of a number of factors like banning of burning rangelands which used to be effective in controlling bush encroachment, disruption of the traditional ‘gadda’ system of managing the rangelands through having permanent settlements, placement of various water holes and increase in farmland. In addition to this, there has been severe pressure on the rangelands due to the increased number of cattle and human population and the recurrence of drought (Sabine, 2004). Due to these reasons the Liben Lark is now listed by IUCN as being ‘Critically Endangered’ (Donald *et al*, 2010).

To guide planned restoration, this project collected data on bird and larger mammal populations. It undertook education and outreach activities with the local communities, schools and offices in the area. Billboards and brochures were produced in order to promote the significance of the area. A workshop was conducted in Negelle town with the various stakeholders in order to come to a consensus on how to improve the conditions of the rangelands and the conservation status of the Liben Lark.

The major partner of the project was the EWNHS, as the work that they have done earlier and the contacts they have made facilitated our work. They were also our collaborators during the workshop that we conducted. EWCA, OFWE and the Guji Zone and Liben District Administration Offices' collaboration allowed us to conduct our work in the area. Some of the government and non-government office in the area were very crucial in providing vital information about the area. The local community was very decisive in providing information about the current condition of the area and in recommending the way forward.

### **Project members**

1. **AlazarDaka**– Education officer and species surveyor

I did my undergraduate research on “Application of Energy saving stove in reduction of Deforestation at Abijata-Shalla Lakes National Park”, Central Rift valley of Ethiopia. I then worked for conservation of Elephants at Kafta-Shiraro National Park for three months, northern Ethiopia and as a research assistant for six months in Participatory Forest Management, southwest and southeast Ethiopia. I did my MSc research on “The hybridization between Prince Ruspoli’s Turaco and White-cheeked Turaco and their habitat association” at the Addis Ababa University. I worked as a research officer in conservation of Grevy’s zebra in southern Ethiopia. I had training on “Writing for Conservation” in Kenya, Mpala Research Center from October 28 – November 01, 2011 prepared by the CLP.

Major roles in the project include being a species surveyor and giving education during the programs we had at the schools. I was also working on finance and logistics. During the workshop that we conducted, I was helping in the facilitation.

Age group: 30 -35

2. **Bruktawit Abdu** - Project leader and species surveyor

Have a BSc in Applied Biology and working on an MSc on Ecology and Systematic Zoology at the Addis Ababa University. Has had experiences in conducting ecological

fieldworks, mainly focused on birds such as bird ringing, waterfowl census and raptor surveys.

Major roles in the project include being a species surveyor, coordinating the activities to be done along with the project team members and other collaborators, educating students about the using binoculars and bird watching.

Age group: 30 -35

3. **Samson Zelleke**– Logistics and species surveyor

Studied Biology for BSc and later continued in the field of Environmental Science for an MSc. at Addis Ababa University. In 2007, joined the Frankfurt Zoological Society FZS-Ethiopia as a junior consultant for environment projects during which I organized and led the climate awareness program in three different towns of southeast Ethiopia that lasted for one year. Same year, I also conducted soil carbon analysis for Hareenna forest (Southeast Ethiopia). Starting 2010 to present I am working as the team leader for the environmental impact assessment writing group in Saikrishna hi-tech Agri Consultancy PLC (part-time job).

Major role in the project include facilitation in getting field equipment's, designing and printing of educational materials and being a species surveyor.

Age group: 30-35

## SECTION TWO

### Aim and objectives

The project had plans to assess the population of birds and mammals of the Liben plain. We conducted surveys of the area using line transect that were set earlier to know the species diversity of birds and larger mammal species present and to assess their habitat associations, numbers and distribution. To fill the gap of knowledge about the large mammals, we interviewed the local communities. We gave awareness to members of the local community, officials and school children about the importance of the Liben Plain and the need to conserve it. In addition to that, we took students from Negelle high school and Dibe Adama primary schools to the field to identify the avifauna and some mammals in the field. Educational pamphlets were published in English and the local language. We prepared two billboards that show the large mammals and common birds of the Liben plain and put them up at the two school compounds. A workshop was held during the project to discuss the importance of the biodiversity and habitat with local communities, stakeholders, NGOs and regional administrators to help manage the plains in a sustainable way.

### Methodology

The team was using line transects to survey the bird and larger mammal species in the study area. Twenty transects were used - the same transects chosen by (Spottiswoode et al, 2009) in the Plain to record the bird and large mammal species detected along the transects. The general type of habitat where the birds or mammals were seen was also recorded. Distance sampling was used for surveying the bird species detected along the transects by estimating the actual perpendicular distance between the bird and the transect. These surveys were usually done 4-5 hours after sunrise. The same transects were surveyed four times from August 2010 till May 2011.

In order to know more about the large mammal species in the area and about the possible nest predators of the Liben Lark, 86 questionnaires were utilized to ask the local people living in different villages on the plain. This method was used as it is very difficult to

detect large mammals out in the open because the grasslands are quite degraded and provide very little cover for them.

The data on birds was summarized to see the bird diversity through different times of the year and the Shannon-wiener diversity index was used to calculate the bird species diversity of the area. The mammal data was summarized and tabulated in order to know the number of species that currently exist on the plain and those that are extinct.

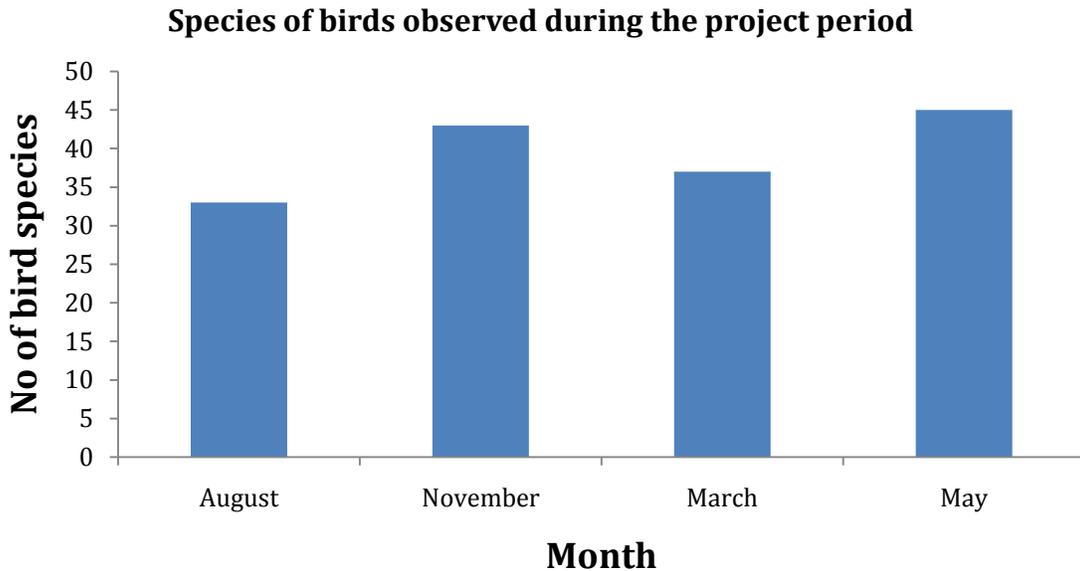
Education was given to primary and high school students in the locality about the Liben Plain, its biodiversity with emphasis on the Liben Lark and the need for its conservation. Method for education included oral presentations with Microsoft Powerpoint, giving out some educational materials, and on-site field training for some students. This task was carried out by arranging three sessions with the Negelle high school students where we introduced our work and that of EWNHS's, about the Liben Plains and the basics of birdwatching. The students also practiced birdwatching in their school compounds with the binoculars that we borrowed from the EWNHS. We had two sessions with the Dibbe Adama primary school as well. Students and teachers from both schools had a field trip in the Liben Plain where they got to practice birdwatching and see different species including the Liben Lark.

A workshop was organized in collaboration with the EWNHS. The title of the workshop was "The Liben Plains: Challenges and Opportunities". Local elders, local administrators, and officials in the locality took part in the workshop. They were able to come to a common agreement about some of the issues concerning the future of the plain.

The project took a total of 15 months including the time spent for doing the literature review, preliminary studies, the actual fieldwork, data entry and analysis, and for report writing.

## Outputs and Results

One of the project objectives was to assess the bird species diversity and abundance. According to the surveys and times outside the survey, 86 species of birds were found. The surveys were done four times during the project and the graph below indicates the number of species observed during the surveys.



With regards to the diversity of the species the Shannon-weiner diversity index was used, which uses this equation:

$$H = -\sum P_i (\ln P_i)$$

Where:

H = the Shannon diversity index

$P_i$  = fraction of the entire population made up of species i

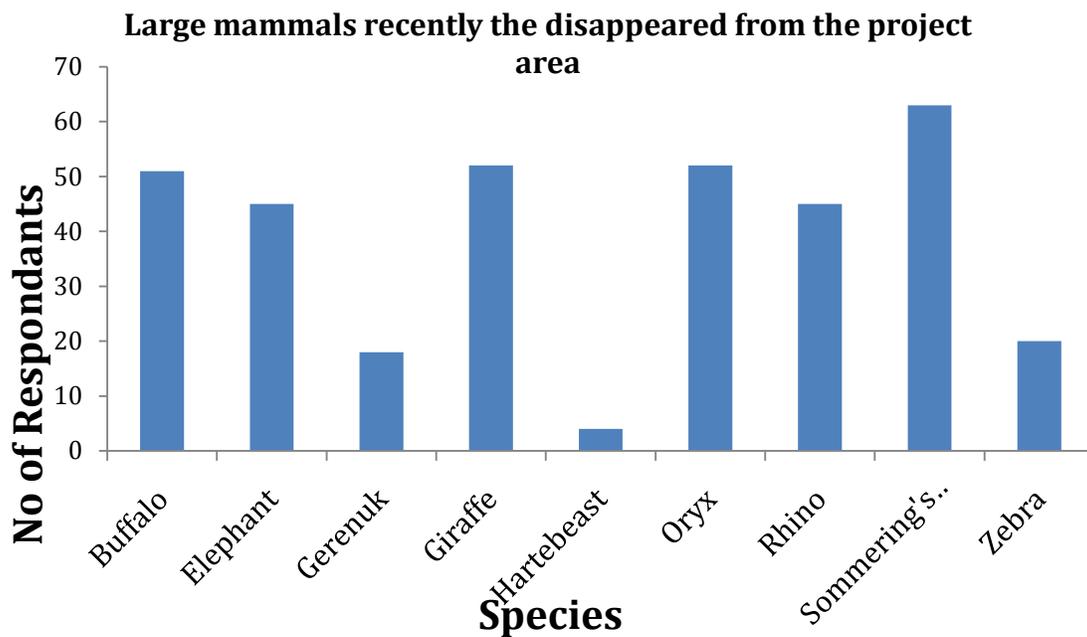
$\sum$  = sum from species 1 to species S

The table below shows the total number of species and their total abundance and the value of the Shannon-weiner diversity index.

Total Species	Total Number of Individuals	H
65	7064	2.8973

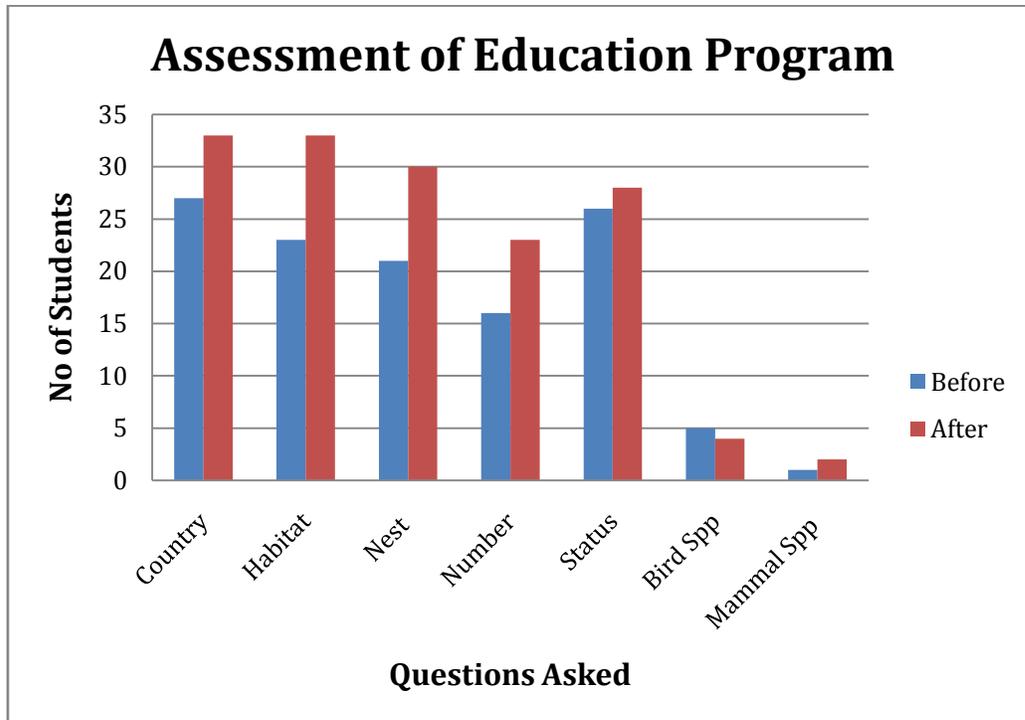
High values of H would be representative of more diverse communities. The result of the Shannon-Wiener Diversity Index showed that, there is high diversity of bird species in the study area. If the species are evenly distributed then the H value would be high. So the H value allows us to know not only the number of species but how the abundance of the species is distributed among all the species in the community.

The current mammal diversity of the area and the species that have disappeared from the area has been assessed using 86 questionnaires. According to the respondents nine species of mammals have disappeared from the area as shown in the graph below.



Thirty species of mammals are currently known to live in the project area of which five are encountered during the species survey. According to the informants, 25 of the species are known from the area. These are listed in decreasing frequency Anubis baboon, lion, hyena, greater kudu, vervet monkey, duiker, black backed jackal, leopard, dikdik, bushpig, warthog and porcupine (raw data attached).

The other component of the project was the education and outreach program. Educational programs were held in two schools in the area with lectures and field trips. Questionnaires were conducted with the students before and after the field trips and lectures in order to see how effective the programs were. The graph below shows the results.



A workshop was conducted with various stakeholders and had the following recommendations from the participants

- Halting the expansion of agriculture in the habitat of the Liben Lark
- Designating and setting up scattered enclosures in order to restore the rangelands and to benefit the Liben Lark
- Clearing bush as a means of combating rangeland degradation
- Using safer chemicals for maintaining the health of the livestock
- Working more on the tourism sector to promote the Liben Lark as well as other wild animals and sites found in the Guji Zone

- To work together with all the major stakeholders in a more integrated manner

### Achievements and Impacts

- We were able to identify 86 species of birds and 25 species of mammals (5 species are observed and the remaining species are known from interviews); five more species were known by the local names and nine species of large mammals were found to no longer exist on the plain according to the interviews.
- 86 interviews were conducted with the designed questionnaires with the local community from the Siminto and Meisa PA to know about the mammal diversity in the project area.
- An educational session was organized twice at the Negelle High School during November, 2010 and March, 2011 in order to familiarize the school community about the importance of the Liben Plain, the threats that it is facing and about the works that are being done by the CLP team as well as the EWNHS. In March, training was given on the basics and importance of birdwatching and how to use binoculars, after which we had practical lessons with about 20 students and a few teachers in their compound.
- Save the Children (an NGO with an office in Negelle) had organized a workshop in March about fire ecology as a means of restoring the grasslands. We were able to raise awareness about the Liben Lark and its ecology among the various participants.
- Field trips were organized in May for Dibe Adama primary school and Negelle high school for 40 students and six teachers from both schools. The students were actively participating during the field trip when asking them to form groups to identify, write and present a list of birds and mammals that they saw in the field. Games were also designed about the environment to learn more about the animals and the treats that they face. One student from the Dibe Adama school wrote a poem about the Liben Lark and the threats that it is facing in the local language and presented it to the group.

- Workshop was held for two days with the title “The Liben plain: opportunities and challenges”. Different papers were presented by professionals from different offices for the participants, which addressed the problem of the Liben plain.
- Our birding, data management, project management, communication and presentation skills have been enhanced.

The significant findings of the research will be published in an international journal. The report of our research will be distributed to Government Organizations and NGOs working on conservation as well as to administrative offices at the regional and federal level. From the field visit and lectures given in the schools the students became aware of the Liben plain and promised to participate in the conservation of the biodiversity of Liben plain. The published pamphlets and the workshop conducted together raised awareness about the current situation on the plain and created a forum for suggesting the way forward among the various stakeholders. The zone and district tourism offices are encouraged to do more in terms of tourism sector on Liben plain, especially on Liben Lark. The results from the project will aid the EWNHS as well as the BirdLife International in their efforts to save the Liben Lark from extinction. Follow-up projects will be planned to work on conserving the plains and empowering the local community to combat rangeland degradation.

## SECTION THREE

### Conclusion

One of the major aims of this project was to assess the bird and mammal population of the Liben plain in order to give weight to the conservation of the Liben Lark. The population assessment was done by running transects and conducting questionnaires. 86 species of birds and 25 species of mammals were found.

The other objective of the project was to work on outreach and education in order to assist in the conservation of the Liben Lark and the restoration of its habitat. Education programs were conducted in two schools and informally with the community. A workshop was conducted with the aim of bringing together various stakeholders to discuss and to forward suggestions about the possible means of reversing the rangeland degradation and saving the Liben Lark from the brink of extinction (details found in the attached workshop proceedings).

The group members were able to enhance and develop their skills in various aspects like project running, surveying, education, writing and workshop organizing.

### Problems encountered and lessons learnt

- There was a problem of getting good field guidebooks, which was solved when getting the opportunity to have someone purchase it for us from abroad.
- Binoculars were essential for the educational program that was conducted at the two schools and for the field visits; solved by borrowing a few pairs from the EWNHS and finally with the donation from RSPB.
- There was a logistic problem that is the budget for the transportation but this was solved by shifting the budget of the fourth member (who left the team) to the transportation.
- The devaluation of currency was a problem and this was solved by cost minimizing and reshuffling the budget.

- There was no administration cost incorporated in the project budget thus, we learnt that the administration cost is necessary for running projects.
- The team members did not get project planning training when preparing the project. Now one team member recently got training on project planning, fund raising and proposal writing by a training conducted by the CLP in Kenya.
- Biodiversity awareness of the area was low by the team members and we learnt more during the project period.
- During the project the team members developed confidence of communication with the local communities and officials to run the project smoothly.
- In the awareness raising part of the project, the team members decided to put up billboards within the compound of the two schools, as we believed that it would have more impact. This was initiated due to the fact that none of the students or teachers has seen a picture of the Liben Lark. We then decided to reshuffle our funds in order to put up the billboards.
- The CLP team believed that it would be beneficial to run the transects one more time in May in order to get a better idea about the bird diversity in the Liben plain.
- During this project, the important lessons learnt are the significance of prioritizing project activities, the need to have prompt response to problems and relatively fast decision making, the positive impact of job delegation among team members and the need to spread environmental education especially among the school children in order to have long lasting impact.

### **In the Future**

Recommendations for future projects include:

- Training of interested local individuals for bird guiding services

- Negotiating with local investors and other possible sponsors to include the names of local and endangered bird and mammal species of the eco-region on their private property
- Capacity building of the tourism sector at the zonal level through training (bird surveying techniques, project management and research writing) and availing equipment (guide books, reference books, brochures and binoculars)
- Capacity building of the local community in combating bush encroachment and other means of rangeland degradation through trainings. This includes a specific training on how to eradicate encroaching bush species and rehabilitation methods of degraded rangelands. The field trainings will be supported with the supply of field equipment like machete.
- Mapping of land use land cover of the area to assist decision-making. This could be done with the help of GIS software and some ground truth data. Expected outputs are percentage cover of agricultural area, settlement area, location of wetlands and water points, map of trails or paths to settlement areas and highly degraded areas
- Publishing and distributing promotional materials for awareness rising. This could include putting up billboard signs in the city, brochures about ecological and touristic value of the area

## SECTION FOUR:

### Appendices

In another attachment

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20	Chali Diriba	Liben Woreda Police Office	251916872325
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24	Genene Sherkite	Guji Zone Pastoral Development Office	251916025148
25	Tahira Sharif	Liben Woreda Tourism and Culture Office	251916327192
26	Boneya Haro	Guji Zone Pastoral Development Office	251916776706
27	Sholo Emayo	Liben Woreda Land and Environment Office	251913438237
28	Tura Liben	Siminto Chairperson	251920010093
29	Alemu Daba	Guji Zone High Court	251916934902
30	Iyaa Ousman	Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society	251913598127

## Distribution list

Liben District Tourism Office  
Guji Zone Tourism Office  
Liben District Land Administration  
Liben District Investment Office  
Liben District Pastoralist Office  
Guji Zone Pastoralist Office  
Liben Pastoralist Development Association  
Liben District Administration  
Guji Zone Administration  
Guji Zone Land Administration  
Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (Negelle)  
Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (Addis Ababa)  
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